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Planning and Zoning Commission
Town of Westport
110 Myrtle Ave.
Westport CT 06880

Re: 19-064 71 Hillandale Rd, History, Project Description, & Parking Summary

The Congregational Church of Greens Farms was chartered in 1711 as the West Parish Church of Fairfield and their first meeting house was built near today's Machamux Boulder at Morningside Drive S and Greens Farms Rd. This portion of Fairfield was renamed Greens Farms in 1732 in honor of John Green, one of the original Bankside Farmers and a member of the congregation. A new larger meeting house was built in 1736 near the old colonial cemetery at today's exit 18. That structure and the homes of 15 prominent members, including Rev. Hezekiah Ripley, were burned to the ground in 1779 during the second raid by British General Tryon. The third meeting house was built in 1789 on land donated by Thomas Nash and Moses Sherwood called Meeting House Green on Hillandale Rd. That building was struck by lightning in 1852 and destroyed by fire. The current sanctuary was built in 1853 on that same land. In 1904 the only stained-glass window was donated by ET Bedford in memory of his parents. In 1952 the Nursery School wing was added and in 1960 the sanctuary was remodeled to make room for an organ and a second floor social hall was added to the education wing. The 1999-2000 renovation added an elevator, remodeled the first floor church parlor, added a columbarium to the courtyard, and made many code and handicap accessibility improvements.

GFC is the longest continuously operating organization in our community. Over the 310-year history of this congregation, how the congregants got to church, how they "parked" their "vehicles", how they worshiped and added functions to the 2 acre campus has evolved. Church attendance was mandatory in 1711, and all were required to walk. By 1736 some arrived by horse so stables were added, by 1789 horse drawn carriages were allowed and a large carriage house was built. The first parking lot for cars was added in the early 1900s and enlarged several times and by the 1999 renovation (#99-106) and the 2003 nursery school change (#03-059) there were 98 parking spaces (4 Handicap, 58 9-foot wide "full car" spaces, and 36 "small car" spaces at 7.5 ft wide). 98 Spaces were required and provided.

The current project which was approved by ZBA #7764 on 2/11/20 increases both building coverage and total coverage slightly and provides for re-organizing many of the 1999 interior changes, but does not increase either the size of the sanctuary or the size of the social spaces, which are the determinants of parking. The rear wall of the chancel is being moved to accommodate the restored 115 yr old stained-glass window and make room for the restored organ and different choir seating; the current open courtyard is being roofed over to make room a handicap accessible first floor social hall; the columbarium and memorial garden are being relocated to the right of the front door; the current second floor social hall is being re-purposed to remove the kitchen, add a large youth activities room, two flex meeting rooms, and a small café for youth; new handicap accessible bathrooms are being added on the 1st and 2nd floors; and a second floor is being added to the nursery school wing as the 2 ground floor classrooms are no longer able to be licensed; one small nursery school room is being added to accommodate 6 more children. The first floor of the sanctuary is actually getting smaller and seating being lost due to larger chancel stairs and moving rear walls to create better access to the social hall and code compliant stairs to the balcony; and the balcony is being extended to recapture the lost seating. Many fire code enhancements, including sprinklering the entire structure are planned.

Attached is a spread sheet dated 4/1/20 summarizing the parking requirements from 1996 to 2020. There are 3 uses of the church property which drive the parking requirement: The Nursery School – based on licensed number of children and staff; net Social spaces @ 1 space per 40 SF, and net Worship space @ 1 space per 35 SF; whichever is greatest. The 2003 Nursery School special permit correctly identified the nursery school operates during the week when church is not in session, so the 22 required parking spaces are insignificant. Measuring off the 1999 plans, 2928 SF of net social hall spaces existed, requiring 73 car parking spaces and there were 3421 SF of worship space requiring 97.7, or 98 spaces. The approved site plan showed 98 (oddly sized) spaces in 1996, 1999, and 2003.

In 2007 there was a lot line adjustment process to separate the church owned 63 Hillandale from the main church property at 71 Hillandale. ZBA variance # 6577 was granted to approve the revised lot coverages and the parking at 71 Hillandale. It had been determined by both the church and zoning staff that the previously provided 98 spaces were not working, so the existing parking lots were restriped to create 89 more nearly conforming spaces – 4 handicap and 85 full size. That approved mylar map was recorded as map # 9815 on the Westport Land Records. 98 parking spaces were still “required” in 2007, but 89 were approved and provided; that map #9815 became the existing conditions data for the 2020 applications.

Greens Farms Nursery School has been licensed for 59 children since 2003 with 2 classrooms on the ground floor and 2 on the first floor and resolution 03- 059 permitted the children to use part of the church’s second floor social spaces as indoor play space during inclement weather. Current State of CT licensing guidelines no longer allow nursery school age children in ground floor classrooms, so the church is proposing to add 2 new classrooms on a new second floor so all 59 children can be accommodated above grade. The existing ground floor classrooms will be converted to in-door play space for inclement weather. It is also proposed to add one additional second floor classroom to accommodate 6 kindergarten aged children and 1 staff and to increase state licensing to accommodate 65 total children.

As previously stated, the nursery school is being expanded to add 6 children and 1 staff – increasing the parking requirement from 22 to 24. The re-organization of the combined first and second floor social spaces results in a net decrease of 254 SF or a reduction of 6 spaces to 67.

The many changes to the sanctuary and chancel result in a net increase of only 6 SF of worship space, requiring 97.9 parking spaces, thus 98. The ZBA approved site plan maintains the 91 full sized spaces, 2 more than were approved in 2007. Overflow parking on peak worship Sundays is on the lawn, the lawn of the parsonage at 72 Hillandale, and along Colonial Road. Technically we are allowed 20% small car spaces, but since there have been 89 - 91 spaces provided since 2007 which accommodate everyone on normal Sundays, the need for small car spaces is not there.

The current special permit application #19-064 requests approval of three things:

1. Expansion of the currently non-conforming use on a non-conforming property as approved by ZBA
2. Expansion of the Nursery school to 65 children and 17 staff
3. Recognition that the 91 parking spaces shown on our existing conditions survey and the proposed site plan are sufficient for the worship space which requires 98 spaces.

Very truly yours,

Rick



Richard Benson
GFC Trustee & General Contractor

Greens Farms Church Parking Requirements				71 Hillandale Rd		R.Benson & S.Orban							4/1/2020
Approval Year	1996/1999/2003					2007						2/12/2020	Sp. Permit
Zoning Approvals		Required	Provided	#99-106 & #03-059		Required	Provided	Lot Line Adjustment		Required	Provided	ZBA 7764	Change
								Map #9815 WLR					1999 - 2020
Nursery School								ZBA 6577 2/13/07					
classroom SF -gross	3256				3256					4277			1021
# children -Licensed	59	6	6	59	59	6	6			65	7	7	6
# employees	16	16	16	16	16	16	16			17	17	17	1
Total Parking Req'd		22	22	22		22	22				24	24	2
Social Spaces- Net SF													
2nd Fl Social hall	2152	54	54	2152		54	54			990	25	25	-1162
1st Fl Parlor	776	20	20	776		20	20			1684	43	43	908
Total SF for Social	2928			2928						2674			-254
Total Parking req'd @1 per 40sf		73	73			73	73				67	67	-6
Worship Space- Net SF													
Meeting house	2294			2294						2020			-274
Balcony	390			390						551			161
Chancel	737			737						856			119
Total Worship SF	3421			3421						3427			6
required parking @ 1 per 35 sf	97.7	98	98	97.74	98	98	98			97.9	98	98	0
Full Sized spaces 9 x 18 ft													
Handicap spaces				58			84					86	
Small Car 8 x 16 ft				4			5					5	
Total Parking Provided				36			0					0	
				98			89					91	-7
note: all on-site parking includes 11 spaces on Colonial as approved in 1999 and 2003													
				Existing								Approved	
Building Coverage				14, 604 SF								17,203 SF	
Parking & Driveways				28,499 SF								29,950 SF	
Total Coverage				43,103 SF								47,153 SF	